

Professor Peter Newman
Director, Sustainability Policy Unit
Policy Office
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
197 St Georges Tce, 15th Floor
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Professor Newman,

I am writing on behalf of the Social Justice Commission of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Western Australia. As a “community group” and “social welfare group,” as well as at our best moments an “artistic and creative association,” we would like to make a submission to the State Sustainability Strategy for Western Australia.

We believe that sustainability is a vital, “worthwhile pursuit” not only because of the social, political, environmental, economic, cultural and governmental implications. We believe that sustainability has spiritual implications as well. As affirmed by our 2001 Synod, we are committed to exploring more deeply the interconnection of spirituality and sustainability. Please see the enclosed (adopted) proposal on environmental issues. Care of creation is a sacred trust at the heart of our tradition and we believe that spiritual hope for the future includes the whole of creation. Thus, we understand ourselves as members of a global household (*oikoumene*), where we seek to join with others in working towards a common vision of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

In 1988, the Uniting Church affirmed a commitment to sustainability in its “Statement to the Nation.” In 1991, the Uniting Church further developed a document entitled “The Rights of Nature and Future Generations” (enclosed). While continued exploration of sustainability at practical, theoretical and theological level needs to be done, at present a combined resource is being developed with the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission and Australian Catholic Social Justice Council to be used in preparation for Social Justice Sunday, the last Sunday in September, 2002. There are great opportunities for education on the questions of sustainability to be done through Christian congregations, church institutions and synod events. Thus, we submit that one strategy for “building social cohesion while addressing key economic and environmental issues” can happen through spiritual communities.

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The Social Justice Commission is interested to make a further submission on specific areas. We would be able to make a further submission by the end of April if this would be valuable to the process.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary Hudson Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'R'.

Rosemary Hudson Miller
Social Justice Consultant,
Uniting Church in Australia
WA Synod

The Revd Dr Nancy Victorin-Vangerud
Social Justice Commission
Synod of Western Australia
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Uniting Church in Australia – WA Synod

28th March, 2002

The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Western Australia

SYNOD 2001

28 September - 1 October

On the Move - With Harmony and Grace

SOCIAL JUSTICE PROPOSAL K.9

[Refer to Social Justice Report page F7]

Discussion
Group
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That the Synod agree to:

encourage and challenge both individuals and congregations to:

- (a) become advocates for sustainable environmental policies and practices which protect, honour and care for our natural resources;
- (b) be proactive in supporting local, national and international environmental agreements and initiatives;
- (c) request the Social Justice Commission to initiate a conversation across the synod to develop a practical commitment to the sustainable care of Church land, from a biblical and theological basis;
- (d) study the *Election 2001: A Briefing Paper* regarding the linkage of commitment to our natural environment with commitments such as reconciliation and treaty; regional, rural and remote Australia; fair employment; community service delivery; and structural causes of poverty.

Rationale

Because creation is a good gift (Genesis 1-2:3) from God, the source and wellspring of life, and because God has established an 'everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth' (Genesis 9:16), human beings - as together created in the image of God - participate in the vocation of responsibility and care for our natural environment. Human beings share in the whole plan or *oikonomia* (Ephesians 1:10, 3:9) of God for the justice, peace and integrity of creation. Our faithful hope is for nothing less than the healing and transformation of 'heaven and earth' (Revelation 21:1).

In 1988, the UCA Assembly declared in its *Statement to the Nation* that
...

We affirm our belief that the natural world is God's creation; good in God's eyes, good in itself, and good in sustaining human life.

Recognising the vulnerability of the life and resources of creation, we will work to promote the responsible management, use and occupation of the earth by human societies. We will seek to identify and challenge all structures and attitudes, which perpetuate and compound the destruction of creation.

In Section 3 of the *Basis of Union of the Uniting Church*, we have affirmed the connection of humanity with a global vision of Christian hope:

The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life, it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation of a new humanity, God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view of the whole creation.

In 1991, the UCA recognised in the *Statement to the Nation, the Rights of Nature and Future Generations* that we share life with other living beings in an ecological community, linking human rights with the rights of future generations for sustainable societies:

- we affirm the inalienable dignity of all humans and call for the recognition and guarantee of human rights throughout the world;
- we express the conviction that those who live today share responsibility for the ability of future generations to live in dignity;
- we support the attribution of rights not only to humans but also to nature, God's creation, and we reject the view that animate and inanimate nature are mere objects which stand at the arbitrary disposal of the human.

In recent years we have become aware of major ecological problems as a result of human action and inaction. God's creation is threatened by human sin understood as greed, apathy, exploitation, ignorance and arrogance. Not only does non-human creation suffer, the poor and powerless among humans are often the first to feel the effects of climate change, salinity, species extinction and the loss of diversity. A new relationship with the rest of creation is a major challenge facing humanity in the 21st century. Further policies have been developed by the Church on the use of nuclear fuel, mining, and management of native forests, which show the integral connection of social justice with eco-justice.

Last year at the national Assembly, the Uniting Church accepted the request from Theology & Discipleship (#94) for *The Care of Church Land*, which sought to initiate a discussion across the wider Church. If the Church is to have a credible voice in the discussions of environmental care at the state, national and international levels, it needs to also have its own house in order. The Uniting Church in Australia holds title to thousands of properties across the country.

Congregations, institutions and faith communities can develop guidelines for the care of those properties, which will itself make an important difference, as well as being a practical demonstration in faith to the wider society.



Rights of Nature and Rights of Future Generations

Passed by Assembly, 1991

91.14.18

The Assembly resolved to adopt the resolution on the rights of nature and the rights of future generations:

We believe that God, the Creator, upholds human dignity. God has created the human in the divine image. No human authority can take away or contest the dignity thus bestowed upon the human.

We believe that God has blessed humanity and that God's faithfulness endures from generation to generation.

We believe that God loves the divine creation and wills the development of its life. No creature is indifferent in the eyes of God. Each has its dignity and thereby also its right to existence.

The Holy Scriptures attest to God's covenant with the creation. "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature" (Genesis 9:9-10).

In view of the fact that this promise is today being undermined by human lack of moderation,

- we affirm the inalienable dignity of all humans and call for the recognition and guarantee of human rights throughout the world,
- we express the conviction that those who live today share responsibility for the ability of future generations to live in dignity,
- we support the attribution of rights not only to humans but also to nature, God's creation, and we reject the view that animate and inanimate nature are mere objects which stand at the arbitrary disposal of the human.

We call upon the churches to make room for God's covenant with creation within the realm of law by committing themselves at all levels to recognition of the following "Rights of Future Generations" and "Rights of Nature".

A. Rights of Future Generations

1. Future generations have a right to life.
2. Future generations have a right to an unmanipulated human genetic inheritance, that is, a genetic inheritance not artificially altered by humans.

3. Future generations have a right to a rich plant and animal world, and thereby a right to a life within an abundant nature and to the preservation of multifarious genetic resources.
4. Future generations have a right to healthy air, to an intact ozone layer, and to the sufficient thermal exchange between the earth and space.
5. Future generations have a right to clean and sufficient waters, and, in particular, healthy and sufficient drinking water.
6. Future generations have a right to healthy and fertile soil and to healthy woodland.
7. Future generations have right to substantial reserves of non-(or only very slowly) renewable raw materials and energy sources.
8. Future generations have the right not to be confronted with products and wastes of earlier generations that threaten their health or require excessive expense for protection and control.
9. Future generations have a right to "cultural inheritance", that is, to an encounter with the culture created by earlier generations.
10. Future generations have in general a right to physical living conditions that allow them a humanly dignified existence. In particular, they have a right not to be forced to accept physical alterations deliberately produced by their predecessors that inordinately restrict their individual and collective self-determination in cultural, economic, political, or social respects.

B. Rights of Nature

1. Nature --- animate or inanimate --- has a right to existence, that is, to preservation and development.
2. Nature has a right to the protection of its eco-systems, species, and populations in their inter-connectedness.
3. Animate nature has a right to the preservation and development of its genetic inheritance.
4. Organisms have a right to a life fit for their species, including procreation within their appropriate ecosystems.
5. Disturbances of nature require a justification. They are only permissible- when the presuppositions of the disturbance are determined in a democratically legitimate process and with respect of the rights of nature, - when the interests of the disturbance outweigh the interests of a complete protection of the rights of nature, and - when the disturbance is not inordinate. Damaged nature is to be restored whenever and wherever possible.

6. Rare ecosystems, and above all those with an abundance of species, are to be placed under absolute protection. The driving of species to extinction is forbidden.

We appeal to the United Nations to develop a new Declaration which explicitly protects the rights mentioned above. Simultaneously, we appeal to the individual nations to incorporate these rights into their constitutions and legislation.